

AMO Response to the Data Strategy's 'Discussion Paper 2: Creating Economic Benefits'

October 9, 2019

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) is pleased to submit comments on the Government of Ontario's second Data Strategy discussion paper on 'Creating Economic Benefits.' We are pleased to see the province engaging widely with Ontarians towards the development of a 'made-in-Ontario' Data Strategy. We are also happy to see the province consider the municipal role in creating a province-wide digital first approach. Creating a Data Strategy is timely given the data-driven nature of today's economy and society. Strong data governance standards, supports for municipal data sharing, the development of data/digital literacy and the expansion of high-quality digital infrastructure are all key components of a successful provincial Data Strategy.

Development of Data Governance and Standards

AMO supports the Government of Ontario's proposal to create Shared Data Standards to ensure better data governance and regulation province-wide. The creation of data standards that are usable by the province and easily adaptable to municipal governments of all shapes and sizes is critical in making sure this component of the Data Strategy is a success. AMO encourages the province to engage with AMO and municipal governments, including through discussions with AMO's Digital Government Task Force, to make sure any Shared Data Standards applicable to municipal governments reflect municipal realities. These data standards should aim to ensure privacy while also advancing interoperability between municipal, provincial and federal datasets. The province must keep in mind that digital literacy and the ability to finance digital innovation-related investments for services varies greatly across municipal governments. There cannot be a 'one-size-fits-all' approach.

Supports for Municipal Data Sharing and Digital Government Initiatives

AMO is encouraged to see the province is considering supports for municipal governments to enable municipal data sharing and to allow municipalities to use data more easily. If adequately supported by the province, municipal governments' data can help support business activity locally.

While a number of Ontario municipal governments are leaders in open data, open data portals can be expensive to maintain. Support from the provincial government will be necessary to make sure all municipal governments can participate in the data strategy without creating additional strain on staff resources, municipal budgets and the property tax payer. This will help businesses access municipal data Ontario-wide while also helping lower-capacity municipal governments engage with the data economy.

Another area where there is potential for municipal governments to engage in more innovative practices is on procurement. Any provincial work on procurement innovation should be leveraged and shared with municipal governments to encourage best practices and opportunities for municipal innovation.

Expansion of High-quality Digital Infrastructure

Ontario's focus on building high-quality digital infrastructure is welcome by municipal governments across the province. Lack of access to fast, reliable broadband has held back rural, remote and small municipalities and their local economies for too long. AMO and our members look forward to working with the provincial government to ensure broadband commitments to date become a reality and enable our communities to participate in the data economy.

Conclusion and Next Steps

AMO appreciates the opportunity to provide input into this portion of the Data Strategy consultations. We also look forward to commenting on the province's third discussion paper on 'Enabling Better, Smarter, more Efficient Government.' Municipal governments anticipate that this final discussion paper will be the most relevant to our sector given the relationship between municipalities and the province in service delivery. We encourage the province to work directly with AMO and municipal governments through AMO's Digital Government Task Force as part of the final discussion paper's consultation process. This will ensure municipal perspectives are reflected in any aspects of the data strategy that directly impact the municipal sector.

Should you have any questions on this submission, you can contact AMO's Policy team at policy@amo.on.ca.